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New York

President:	Mr. Pham Gia Khiem/Mr. Bui The Giang	(Viet Nam)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Grauls
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Wang Guangya
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Mubarak
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Shcherbak
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

Letter dated 7 July 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2008/442)

Letter dated 11 July 2008 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/455)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Children and armed conflict

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The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Canada, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Germany, Ghana, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Malawi, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, Rwanda, Somalia, San Marino, Sri Lanka, Uganda and Uruguay, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda.

In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representatives of the aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Edmond Mullet, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and Ms. Kathleen Hunt, Chair of the International Steering Committee, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict.

It is so decided.

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I wish to draw the attention of the Council members to document S/2008/455, which contains a letter from the Permanent Representative of France addressed to the President of the Security Council, transmitting the report of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

I should also like to draw attention to document S/2008/442, which contains a letter dated 7 July 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam.

First of all, I would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his participation in this open debate of the Security Council. I look forward to listening to his insight into the important issue of children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the Executive Director of UNICEF, the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and the representative of the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict for their presence and for the briefings they are going to present to the Council.

Being one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a country where generations of children have suffered immensely from war, Viet Nam is committed to defending and promoting the best interests of children. Our concerns for children affected by armed conflict go beyond conventional reasoning. Viet Nam, as President of the Security Council for this month, has taken the initiative to organize this open debate to strengthen the commitment and efforts of the Security Council, the United Nations and the international community at large towards achieving a long-term and sustained solution to these issues. I thank all members of the Council for sharing the interest.

Since the adoption of its first resolution on children and armed conflict in 1999, the actions taken by the Security Council have produced tangible progress. Formal and informal action plans have been concluded between parties to conflict to identify and release children from fighting forces and to prevent further recruitment. Thousands of children associated with armed groups have thus been released. Specific provisions have been included in peace processes and agreements. Child protection provisions have been incorporated in the mandates of a number of United Nations peacekeeping and political missions. Regular reviews and reports to the Council by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as its valuable recommendations to the Council and country visits by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, along with the work done by UNICEF, have contributed to those achievements.

However, we have to admit that what has been achieved remains too modest. The overall situation of children affected by armed conflict continues to be of serious concern. The international community continues to witness the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The killing and maiming, sexual violence against and abduction of children and attacks against schools and hospitals continue. We condemn those acts and urge all parties concerned to put an end to them.

The Security Council, in its presidential statement (S/PRST/2008/6) last February, outlined a number of important measures to move forward its agenda on children and armed conflict. Viet Nam attaches great importance to a strategy aimed at preventing armed conflict by addressing its root cause and enhancing the protection of children.

The successful implementation of such a comprehensive strategy requires not only participation but also cooperation among the parties concerned and other stakeholders, including Member States, regional organizations, the Secretariat, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). To ensure effective participation and cooperation, in addition to a commitment to providing adequate resources and funding from development agencies and donor countries, it is important to promote mutual confidence and trust in a spirit of partnership, as was emphasized by the Council in its presidential statement (S/PRST/2008/6) of last February.

The consideration of country reports has very often been a difficult process, leading to the erosion of such mutual trust and spirit of partnership. National Governments should be fully consulted in order to avoid such situations and ensure the quality, reliability and objectivity of those reports.

Resolution 1612 (2005) should continue to serve as the basis for improving the reporting and monitoring mechanisms, as well as the activities of the Working Group. We look forward to contributing to the continued improvement of the Group's methods of work.

As a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we join others in calling upon those countries that have not done so to accede to the Protocol.

Finally, I am deeply convinced that, with genuine concern and a spirit of partnership on the part of its members, the Security Council — with the support of and in close coordination with other United Nations agencies, NGOs and countries concerned — can fulfil its commitment to addressing the widespread impact of armed conflict on children.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I welcome the presence of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, at this meeting and invite him to take the floor.

The Secretary-General: I thank the presidency of the Council for organizing a discussion on this important topic.

The protection of children in armed conflict is a litmus test for the United Nations and the Organization's Member States. It is a moral call and deserves to be placed above politics. It requires the innovative and fearless engagement of all stakeholders.

Over the past 12 years, that issue has been placed firmly on the international agenda, beginning with the groundbreaking report of Graça Machel and the establishment of the mandate of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Since then, a solid body of international legal standards has been elaborated. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court classifies the recruitment of children into fighting forces as a war crime and a crime against humanity. The International Labour Organization's

Convention No. 182 defines child soldiering as one of the worst forms of child labour. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child outlaws child soldiering, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child established 18 as the minimum age for children's participation in hostilities. With that foundation in place, the international community is now shifting its focus from standards-setting to an era of application and the provision of real protection. Indeed, we have seen encouraging signs that impunity for crimes against children will no longer be tolerated.

For its part, the Security Council held its first open debate on the subject in 1998 and has returned to the matter again and again. Its resolutions have focused in particular on six grave violations drawn from international humanitarian law: abduction, sexual violence, child soldiers, killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access. The Council has established a Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, and the monitoring and reporting mechanism is now operational in 15 situations of concern. I am also encouraged to note that action plans from several parties to conflict have been secured, in which those parties agree to the release of children from their ranks.

Of course, once children are released, we must be ready to support their full and sustainable reintegration into society, in line with the good practices set out in the Paris Principles. I call on the international community to strengthen its support for Governments, development partners and others involved in such efforts, including through the mobilization of the necessary resources. Let us not forget that poverty and underdevelopment can make children more vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

I commend the Council for its work on this issue, which is beginning to yield results. Yet we have only begun to scratch the surface. I hope that the Council will consolidate the gains that have been made and move forward to cover all grave violations and all situations of concern. Political will is crucial. Only concerted international efforts involving all United Nations partners will be capable of meeting the needs of children living in situations of armed conflict. I look forward to working with the Council so that children can be safe and, above all, so that they may dream of a better future for themselves, their families and their communities.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Ms. Coomaraswamy: I welcome you here to New York and to this Chamber, Mr. President. I also welcome the opportunity to participate in this open debate on the theme of children and armed conflict. I thank the delegation of Viet Nam and Mr. Le Luong Minh for their foresightedness in choosing this topic and for working with dedication on this issue of importance to all of us. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his presence here today and for his constant support of this mandate. I would also like to thank the Chair of the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and all its members for their tireless efforts in bringing this issue to bear in the work of the Council. For the many children who have benefited from its robust action, I would like to further thank the Council on their behalf.

Earlier this year, we had an opportunity to undertake such an open debate around the annual report (S/2007/757) of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. During that debate, I stressed the concerns of the report, reiterating the position that the Security Council is the United Nations body of action on issues of peace and security and that it should take steps to begin to consider targeted and concrete measures against the 16 persistent violators who have been on the shame list of the Secretary-General's report for four consecutive years. I also requested the Council to consider moving the agenda forward and to expand the scope of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to cover all situations of concern and all grave violations against children, especially the crime of sexual violence, which, like the recruitment of child soldiers, is always deliberate, targeted and a direct consequence of criminal intent, and which received the special attention of the Council recently in resolution 1820 (2008). I reiterate those messages again today and hope that the Council, in its wisdom, will move towards greater protection for children in conflict zones.

In that context, I look forward to the discussions regarding the possibility of adopting a new resolution that would capture some of the concerns that have developed in the attempt to implement resolution 1612

(2005). The new resolution must move the agenda forward by expanding the gateway to the annexes to include all other grave violations or at the very least, and especially after the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), lay renewed emphasis on the question of sexual violence against children. Such a resolution should also consider the possibility of setting up a process that would eventually lead to taking targeted measures against persistent violators.

This debate on children and armed conflict thus allows us to move beyond the immediate agenda of the Security Council, to reflect on the bigger picture and the longer term issues concerning children and armed conflict. During the course of the year, Member States have expressed the view that my Office should look more deeply into the root causes of grave violations against children, especially the phenomenon of children associated with armed groups, and also look more closely at the problems of reintegration and sustainable development. As a result, my Office is in the process of convening a research project on the root causes of children being associated with armed groups, and we hope to convene a meeting later this month of child protection experts to identify the crucial messages and gaps with regard to reintegrating children affected by conflict into their societies.

The reintegration of children in situations of armed conflict is a long-term process. A recent seminal study by the Harvard School of Public Health, which followed former child combatants over a 10-year period, showed that the impact of the conflict continues even after 10 years, with many having psychosocial problems. That is particularly true of those who were made to commit very violent crimes and those who were subject to sexual violence. Girl children had the worst indicators, with the majority having major problems with social integration because of a low level of acceptance by families and communities. The younger the children recruited and the longer they stayed associated with the armed groups, the more difficult the adjustment. Another very interesting aspect is that even children who were not associated with armed groups but who lived in situations of armed conflict displayed the same vulnerabilities. Education was found to be key for the successful recovery of children. It is for that reason that my Office and UNICEF are considering compiling a manual of best practices in line with the Paris Principles, an important initiative by the Government of France, which sets out the standards for reintegration programmes.

Although I am in perfect agreement that understanding the root causes of conflict and identifying strategies for reintegration are important, they should not steer the Council away from its task of ensuring accountability for and fighting the impunity of persistent and grave violators of children's rights in situations of armed conflict, a task in which it has supreme advantage over other organs of the United Nations, including the possibility of imposing targeted measures. While the funds and programmes and other parts of the United Nations are well placed to respond to root causes and the need for sustainable development, it is the Security Council that can focus on grave violations. The Council, as the guardian organ of peace and security, must concentrate on taking action against those who persistently violate its resolutions. Though it must deepen its understanding, it must not move away from its central focus. It will be most effective if it focuses on taking firm action against those who commit grave violations against children and who, by doing so, threaten peace and security.

Over the past three months, I have visited Iraq, Chad, the Central African Republic and Afghanistan to review first-hand the problems of children affected by armed conflict in those situations of concern. In Chad and the Central African Republic in particular, I have seen how the Council's work under resolution 1612 (2005) is having a direct effect on the ground, how the imprimatur of the Council results in non-State actors entering into agreements and releasing children, how Governments sit up and listen and how child protection activists, both within and outside the United Nations system, are strengthened and empowered by the Council's commitment. All of that is a tribute to the Council's willingness to embark on the unprecedented initiative that is resolution 1612 (2005). I wish I could bring the children who have been released from the clutches of armed groups because of the Council's actions so that it might see the fruit of its work. It is important that we collectively reassert our commitment on this issue, so that we may move forward realistically and move the agenda as well.

Finally, my visits to Iraq and Afghanistan have convinced me that the nature of warfare is changing, that there are different and more difficult challenges ahead in protecting children and that the Council must

play its part. Aisha was the 11-year-old girl we met in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Throughout the one hour I was with her and her family, she did not smile, and her eyes reflected sadness. Her family was a victim of collateral damage, and her school had been attacked by insurgents. Yet, despite all the dangers, she was determined to go to school, and her eyes lit up only when she said she hoped to be a teacher.

The time has come for us to redouble our efforts in those regions and to renew our commitment to ensuring that children will not be recruited or used as suicide bombers, that they will not be detained in military detention without due process that protects their vulnerability as minors, that their schools will not be attacked, that they or their families will not become collateral damage and that girl children will not be the targets of sexual violence or be denied access to school. Children in those harsh battlegrounds must also be able to dream of a democratic world, free of violence, guided by tolerance and diversity, where everyone will live in peace and dignity.

I end my statement today with the words of Emmanuel Jal, the former child soldier from Sudan who filled Conference Room 4 yesterday with a song he dedicated to the humanitarian worker who rescued him along with 175 others. He said, "I stand here because someone cared. I stand here because someone dared. The sky is now my limit".

The President: I thank Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy. I now give the floor to Mr. Edmond Mullet, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

Mr. Mullet: Thank you, Mr. President, for inviting the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to attend this debate.

This debate is a testament to the great significance that the Security Council attributes to the question of children and armed conflict. Over the past decade, there has been universal recognition that conflicts inflict far-reaching and devastating consequences upon children. The landmark 1996 study, "Impact of armed conflict on children", the Machel study (A/51/306), highlighted the harrowing plight of children in conflict situations.

As indicated in the concept paper before the Council (S/2008/442), we in DPKO have stepped up to the challenge, made considerable progress and achieved tangible results. Since 2001, specific provisions on child protection have been included in over 12 peacekeeping mission mandates, and the Security Council has adopted six resolutions on children and armed conflict. The Council has also repeatedly called for the integration of the protection, rights and well-being of children affected by armed conflict into all aspects of peacemaking. The Security Council's resolutions have guided DPKO's work in the area of children. In 2001, we deployed the first child protection adviser, to Sierra Leone. Today, the Department hosts over 60 child protection advisers in seven peacekeeping missions, who work to ensure that our missions adopt a child-conscious approach. Through them, DPKO has achieved the following.

In virtually every mission with child protection advisers, training on children's rights has been a key activity. For example, in 2007 the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) conducted 126 training sessions for over 3,200 peacekeeping personnel, including the police and civilians. In the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the Child Protection Section conducted training for over 800 personnel, both uniformed and civilian, in the last quarter of 2007 alone.

In 2005, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, in close collaboration with the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and partners, initiated a dialogue with the parties to the conflict, in accordance with Security Council resolutions to end recruitment and use of child soldiers. By 2007, over 1400 children had been released from armed groups. Today, over 3,000 children have benefited from reintegration programmes implemented by UNICEF and partners. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to lead advocacy efforts to release children associated with armed groups in the east, estimated to be at least 10 per cent of the estimated 25,000 troops in the region.

Child-protection advisors have played a critical role in monitoring and reporting child-rights violations. In countries where the monitoring and reporting mechanism is being implemented, DPKO co-chairs the United Nations country taskforce on monitoring and reporting with UNICEF. This mechanism not only contributes to holding perpetrators of child-rights violations accountable, but also serves as a critical tool

to guide the response of child-protection actors to the needs of children on the ground.

DPKO has also been effective in conducting advocacy on politically sensitive issues. Through such work, DPKO supports operational partners, who may be unable to engage in overt political advocacy with regard to violations of child-rights without risking the jeopardization of their long-term programmes on the ground. The integrated mission approach also ensures that we work closely and synchronize our efforts with partners, such as UNICEF, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on children's issues.

As long as children continue to suffer from war and its consequences, including weak justice systems, a deficit in basic infrastructure and poverty, we cannot falter in our effort or celebrate success. We must strive to ensure an environment in which children's rights are fully respected and their welfare is protected, i.e. a peaceful and just environment in which they can flourish and meaningfully contribute to their communities.

DPKO is contributing to these efforts through the very nature of its operations aimed at helping societies begin to rise from the ashes of conflict and instability. In this connection, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti has been actively working, through the justice section and the United Nations police, in close collaboration with UNICEF, on juvenile justice, legal reform and capacity building of the police and local judicial actors. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a new comprehensive law on the protection of children was recently adopted by the national assembly; it represents a product of intensive and concerted advocacy efforts of all child-protection actors on the ground.

These achievements have been made possible by the mandate given to us by the Security Council. DPKO is committed to protecting children in armed conflict and is currently developing a departmental policy to better guide our work in this regard. Meanwhile, we will continue to look to the Security Council for mandates with clear and robust provisions for the protection of children.

The President: I thank Mr. Mullet for his statement. I shall now give the floor to Ms. Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Ms. Veneman (UNICEF): I appreciate the opportunity to join the Security Council today to discuss the situation of children affected by armed conflict. UNICEF welcomes the President's initiative to hold this open debate to consider, in particular, how the Security Council, the United Nations and the international community as a whole can better contribute to long-term and sustainable solutions regarding the issue of children and armed conflict. I commend my colleague, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, for her tireless efforts in helping to draw global attention to the impact on children in situations of armed conflict.

Children continue to suffer from the horrors of war. Children have to cope with violence and the loss of family, homes and community, and many have been killed or maimed, even long after conflict has come to an end. Children also suffer from the indirect impact of war through a resurgence in preventable diseases, such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, measles and malaria.

Conflict and post-conflict countries have some of the highest rates of under-five mortality. Of the 33 countries affected by armed conflict during 2002 to 2006, 20 have experienced insufficient or no progress towards the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on child mortality. Conflict and strife often break down public health services and the rule of law and contribute to food insecurity, population displacement and continued insecurity. Rehabilitation of key services and infrastructure requires security and political stability.

When entire communities are in a state of upheaval, schools can provide a safe haven and a sense of normality. It is therefore crucial that their sanctity be protected and that access to vital services, such as health care, clean water and basic sanitation are not disrupted.

UNICEF welcomes the endorsement by 92 States of the 2006 Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development and encourages other States to join this process. The Declaration will contribute to the protection of children through the promotion of actions to reduce armed violence, improve human security and build a culture of peace.

UNICEF has a long history of advocating and assisting in the release and reintegration of children used by armed forces and groups. We know from experience that it is possible to reintegrate these children, especially when they are provided with assistance and the skills needed to become positive and productive members of society. Yet reintegration is a difficult and long-term process requiring a long-term commitment. UNICEF works with States and non-State actors to stop the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

The 2007 Paris Commitments reinforce international consensus on the unlawful recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. These commitments also reiterate measures States can take to protect children caught in conflict and the steps they can take to help reintegrate them with their families and their communities.

Children become associated with armed conflict groups for many reasons. They may have no choice or they might view enlistment as their best survival option, or as a way of escaping other violence and discrimination.

Reintegrating children into communities needs to be done with an eye to future stability, not only of the child, but of society as a whole. Some important lessons have been learned. One is that reintegration programmes must avoid further stigmatizing the child. Successful reintegration also requires predictable and sustained funding that can be disbursed in a timely manner and that will continue to be available despite periods of instability. As has been shown in northern Uganda and Sri Lanka, children's lives can be improved by protection measures and reintegration activities, even while political solutions are being sought.

UNICEF greatly appreciates the commitment and the efforts of the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The purpose of the monitoring and reporting mechanism is to monitor, report and respond to the situation of child victims of conflict in order to reduce the occurrence of grave violations against children, enhance accountability of perpetrators and prevent further grave violations in situations of armed conflict.

As we approach the third anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005) and the setting up of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, there are promising signs of progress. In Côte d'Ivoire and Sri Lanka, for example, recruitment and use of children in conflict has diminished significantly. Yet, more must be done to better monitor, prevent and respond to violations against children and to ensure respect for the rule of law.

Girls and women in conflict situations are extremely vulnerable because of the sexual violence perpetrated by armed forces and groups. Sexual violence is too often used as a weapon of war. The Security Council's recent resolution 1820 (2008) is a welcome expression of its determination to take measures to address sexual violence against children, particularly girls.

Earlier this year, I visited Sierra Leone. While there, I met a young woman named Mariatu, who was a victim of the many years of conflict in that country. At the age of 12, she was captured and raped, and both of her arms were cut off by the perpetrators. Her story is still unfolding. She had never been to school, but today she is attending university in Canada.

The best way to protect children is to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict and violence in the first place. Development and post-conflict reconstruction, if done well, can address the root causes of violence and thus protect children from exposure to armed conflict. As Graça Machel urged in 2001, we "must shatter the political inertia that allows circumstances to escalate into armed conflict and destroy children's lives" (*A/51/306, para. 253*).

UNICEF hopes that today's discussions will help strengthen the collective commitment to protect children from conflict and violence across the political, humanitarian and development agendas of the United Nations. UNICEF, through its mandate, its country presence before, during and after crises, and its capacity to advocate for children can contribute to the prevention of conflict as well as to immediate and long-term solutions once conflict has erupted.

The challenge is immense but not insurmountable. Children continue to bear the brunt of conflict, but they also demonstrate resilience and the capacity to overcome the violence around them and to help build peace within themselves and within their communities.

Ishmael Beah, with whose painful story many of us are familiar, is a case in point. His powerful and

best-selling book chronicles his experiences as a child soldier in Sierra Leone and his difficult transition back to a normal life with the help of UNICEF. Last November, I appointed Ishmael as a UNICEF Advocate for Children Affected by War. He continues to speak on behalf of young people whose childhoods have been scarred by abuse, violence and deprivation.

Let us never forget the stories of Ishmael, Mariatu and thousands more like them as we move forward with a shared sense of urgency in helping to build a better world for children.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Kathleen Hunt, Chairperson of the Steering Committee of the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict.

Ms. Hunt: On behalf of my colleagues on the Steering Committee of the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the hundreds of members of our network around the world, I thank the Government of Viet Nam for hosting today's open debate and for offering this opportunity to civil society representatives to brief the Security Council. Welcome to New York, Sir.

I also wish to express our appreciation for the significant time and effort that all members of the Security Council have dedicated to implementing the Council's own groundbreaking mandates, including its resolutions 1325 (2000), 1460 (2003), 1530 (2004), 1612 (2005) and, recently, 1820 (2008). Think of the ordinary people we know in war-ravaged villages who really do look to the Council to exercise its power to achieve real improvements for their girls and boys thousands of miles from this Chamber.

The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a coalition of non-governmental organizations that brings together the resources of both operational humanitarian and human rights agencies. Five and a half years ago, the Watchlist first appeared before the Security Council in an Arria formula briefing to reiterate the call by Mrs. Graça Machel — in her landmark survey on the effects of armed conflict, already mentioned today — to make children and armed conflict a matter of international peace and security and to create a United Nations-led monitoring and reporting system to protect children caught up in war.

Since then, as previous speakers have outlined, the Security Council's leadership on children in armed conflict has made significant progress. Thanks to the country-level task forces mandated under resolution 1612 (2005), the consolidation of efforts carried out under United Nations country teams, peacekeeping operations and the Peacebuilding Commission demonstrates the Organization's enormous potential to prevent egregious violations, to respond to them quickly and to end impunity for their assailants.

However, given those successes and the Security Council's potential to totally change the lives of children in the most dangerous circumstances, there is no time to lose. The Council must maintain its momentum and enable the groundbreaking Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to carry out the mandate that the Council has given it. That means, first and foremost, overcoming the delays and deadlocks that have impeded the formulation of conclusions for specific reports and making use of the range of tools in the Working Group's innovative "tool kit".

Equally crucial in countries emerging from decades of violence and destruction, it means ensuring that programmes for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of children are executed in a timely manner and are sufficiently resourced over the necessary long term so that girls and boys can enjoy their basic rights to life, health and education in their community's painful transition from bloodshed to development.

When the Security Council became seized of the plight of children and armed conflict, it was at a time when hideous images of boys and girls slung with bandoliers and Kalashnikov rifles, of civilians with hacked-off limbs and of sexual savagery shocked the human spirit, as they continue to do. Since then, the monitoring and reporting system mandated by the Council under resolution 1612 (2005) has made considerable advances, which the Watchlist documented in a study of four countries, released before last February's open debate. The Council's recent resolution 1820 (2008), as mentioned by previous speakers, gives added hope for more robust action to stop the rampage of sexual violence in armed conflict and to provide desperately needed protection and services to children and women.

Our statement is a call to action urging all those present here, representatives of other States Members

of the United Nations, regional bodies, civil society and national Governments to respond with the resources and remedies needed to ensure that their historic commitments to children and to international peace and security do not lapse into vacant clichés. To that end, we urge the Council to act without delay on the following five priorities.

Firs', it is necessary to demand accountability from perpetrators by imposing targeted measures when warranted.

Secondly, the Council should call on its Working Group to continue to review reports of violations, to complete effective conclusions in a timely manner, to make practical recommendations for action and to utilize all the tools at its disposal.

Thirdly, we urge the Council to support the system-wide strengthening of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and, as others have urged, to expand the scope of the mechanism to include sexual violence as a trigger for activating it.

Fourthly, it is also essential that donors adequately resource DDR programmes for children, with an emphasis on the necessary long-term, community-based reintegration programmes, as precisely described by Special Representative Coomaraswamy.

Finally, looking towards the coming year, we ask the Council to reaffirm its readiness to build upon the provisions of resolution 1612 (2005) with a view to increasing the efficiency of the resolution's key aspects through a new resolution on children and armed conflict in 2009.

As with all matters of peace and security, but especially those concerning the most vulnerable populations, we urge the Security Council to maintain its vigilance and overcome obstacles — usually political — that block full implementation of its resolutions. Resolution 1612 (2005), together with its related body of law, has set global standards and, indeed, has made a global promise. It is a promise we urge the Council to keep.

The President: I thank Ms. Hunt for her statement. I now give the floor to the representative of France, Ambassador Jean-Maurice Ripert, Chairman of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and Permanent Representative of France.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me first to thank the Deputy Prime Minister of Viet Nam for his initiative in convening us here today for this meeting on children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Ms. Coomaraswamy, Ms. Veneman and Mr. Mullet for their contributions to this debate, and more generally, for their tireless devotion to the cause of children in armed conflict. We have also listened with the greatest attention to the remarks and suggestions made by the representative of Watchlist.

I would like to make a number of brief comments on the annual report on the activities of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, established pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005) (S/2008/445), a working group I have had the honour of chairing for the past year. The report reflects the sustained activity of the Working Group that has accompanied the implementation of the monitoring and reporting machinery under resolution 1612 (2005) in an increased number of situations of conflict. The activities focused on reviewing the reports produced by this machinery and adopting operational conclusions on the reports. The negotiation of these conclusions required efforts of varying intensity, depending on the situation under review, which, on some occasions, led to delays between the review of the report and the adoption of conclusions. Nevertheless, the Working Group has managed to adopt detailed conclusions for all the situations it has reviewed.

These conclusions provide the parties concerned with specific indications about the measures that have to be taken or that are recommended for the release of child soldiers and also is a useful tool for actors in the field such as UNICEF, child-protection advisers in the peacekeeping operations or the Special Representative of the Secretary-General during her visits, allowing them to obtain results.

I would also like to recall that the Working Group currently functions without using Secretariat resources other than the use of meeting rooms and interpretation, which unfortunately is not always available, a problem that runs counter to the rules of the Organization.

I would like to conclude on this point by thanking all members of the Working Group for their contributions. The initial results obtained should encourage us all to pursue with determination the implementation of the mandate assigned to us by the

Security Council, aware of the opportunity given us to contribute to changing the destiny of children in armed conflict also gives us great responsibilities. Individually and collectively, we must shoulder these responsibilities.

I would now like to speak on behalf of the European Union and those countries that have aligned themselves with this statement. My full statement can be found in the document that has been disseminated in the Chamber. I would here like to single out the key points of the European Union's position: support for the analysis and recommendations in the Secretary-General's reports on children in armed conflict; the condemnation of all violations perpetrated against children and a call for all parties to halt these crimes immediately; the importance we ascribe to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and to the role that the International Criminal Court, created by the Rome Statute exactly ten years ago day for day, plays in the fight against impunity — there will be no peace without justice; support for the Security Council's strong commitment to this issue, in particular through its resolutions, the activities of its Working Group and the use by the Council of the tools available to it, including sanctions; support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; promoting a broad-based approached to the problem, addressing development and humanitarian issues as well as security issues and the promotion of human rights.

The European Union commends the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism for all conflict situations where children are involved. The European Union welcomes the Working Group's adoption of concrete conclusions and welcomes the fact that these have led to positive results, as was reflected in the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/609-S/2007/757). It calls on all parties concerned to implement these conclusions.

The European Union also recognizes that, to date, the Working Group and the Security Council have not used or recommended using all the instruments that are available to them and encourages the Working Group and the Security Council to take resolute measures against those parties to conflict to urge them to stop violations.

Finally, the European Union invites the Secretary-General and the Secretariat to focus on the need to equip the Security Council Working Group with the required means, allowing it to continue its initiatives effectively and transparently.

The Council of the European Union affirmed in its latest conclusions that the protection and promotion of children's rights, in particular those of children affected by armed conflict, remained a priority for external action by the European Union. In June 2008, the Council of the European Union adopted an updated version of its guidelines, increasing the number of priority countries and fully integrating the Paris Commitments and Principles into European Union reference texts.

The issue of children in armed conflict is therefore better reflected in our common foreign and security policy and also in European Union security and defence operations, such as the European Union Force (EUFOR), currently in place in Chad and the Central African Republic, to protect the population of refugees and internally displaced persons from Darfur.

The European Union is financing a significant number of projects for the benefit of children in armed conflict situations. Thus, more than €100 million have been disbursed since 2000 to that end. It is imperative that the efforts undertaken in the context of resolution 1612 (2005) be supplemented by strong efforts from the international community to prevent child recruitment and to reintegrate children associated with armed groups. Moreover, as is stressed in the Paris Commitments and Principles, it is also necessary that reintegration programmes take children's diverse needs into account, in particular ensuring that girls and children with disabilities are not excluded. These programmes must be integrated into broader-based actions, targeting communities into which the children will be reintegrated. And finally, it is necessary that these programmes benefit from long-term donor commitment.

The European Union is determined to work closely with all concerned countries and organizations to prevent children from being recruited, raped, mutilated, killed or simply deprived of education and robbed of their childhood during conflicts and then abandoned or stigmatized in the post-conflict period. It calls upon the Security Council to also continue to work towards the fulfilment of these goals.

Children who are the victims of armed conflict worldwide are our children; let us not abandon them.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver condensed versions when speaking in the Council Chamber.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): The United States welcomes the opportunity to shine the spotlight at this open debate of the Security Council on one of the true evils of our time — the forcible recruitment, use and targeting of children in armed conflict. That brutal and debilitating practice can destabilize societies, perpetuate the cycle of violence, and rob innocent victims of their childhoods and their futures. We have an obligation and a vital role in helping to protect the most vulnerable members of conflict-ridden societies, especially children.

Three years ago, we adopted resolution 1612 (2005) to address the issue. We appreciate the commitment and efforts of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict under the leadership of its French Chair and its staff to make progress on that issue. In particular, it is encouraging that members of the Council have demonstrated their interest in addressing the subject by meeting regularly in the Working Group and working hard to build consensus on country-specific situations. We also welcome the efforts of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to highlight and document the problem. Her country visits have led to increased dialogue and cooperation among United Nations partners to bring about more effective protection for children affected by conflicts. All those efforts have made a difference.

However, despite our current efforts, the abhorrent practice of recruiting and using child soldiers persists in many countries. For example, in Burma, the military and non-State armed groups continue to recruit and use children as soldiers, some as young as 10-years old, and arrest children for desertion. In Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers and a Government-supported paramilitary group called the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) also continue to use child soldiers. While we welcome the initial release of 39 child soldiers by the TMVP, more must be done to ensure the release of the rest. In the Darfur region of the Sudan, there is ongoing recruitment and use of child soldiers both by Government soldiers, such as the Janjaweed militia, and by various armed rebels, and there is ongoing recruitment of children from refugee and internally displaced persons camps on both sides of the Chad-Sudan border.

"Recruitment" is a gentle term. It often means abduction, threats and punishment, and forcing children to commit horrific acts of murder and mutilation. Besides recruitment, there are other atrocities committed against children. For example, in Afghanistan, the Taliban and insurgents have engaged in systematic attacks on schoolchildren and school buildings, including a number of killings and bombings, in a deliberate attempt to intimidate and prevent girls from accessing education, thereby stealing their futures. The Taliban has also used children as human shields and to carry out suicide attacks.

Another deplorable act committed against children is the targeting of girls, and not seldom boys, as victims of sexual violence, including rape, during conflict situations. For example, the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict indicates that 60 per cent of the cases recorded in the northern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo involved victims between the ages of 11 and 17.

Given the problems of children and armed conflict, what more should be done? Currently, the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers are the only criteria available to the Secretary-General to bring State and non-State actors to the attention of the Security Council Working Group. It is time to review our trigger list and see whether we should include sexual violence as well. Although the Working Group of the Security Council has taken steps forward, its processes for decision-making sometimes take too long and need to be more efficient and effective. If we are serious about addressing the problem, we have to come together and use the tools that are available expeditiously. Unfortunately, some members talk the talk, but do not walk the walk. When it comes to doing things, they oppose effective and timely action.

The time has come to move forward in an expeditious fashion, focusing on the violators. Offenders need to know that the Security Council will take action and utilize the tools of targeted measures,

and that there is no impunity for crimes committed against children.

Finally, we thank the Vietnamese delegation and you, Sir, for hosting this meeting on such an important topic. The recruitment, use and targeting of children in armed conflict are intolerable. The United States remains committed to using the tools available, including regular monitoring and reporting, the deployment of child protection advisors in United Nations peacekeeping operations and political missions as appropriate, public condemnation, targeted measures against violators, and support for reintegration efforts to deal with that tragedy. We are counting on Viet Nam's support.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): I would like first of all to convey our warmest welcome and express our thanks to you, Sir, and to the Government of Viet Nam for having taken the initiative to convene this open debate on children and armed conflicts. That is an issue to which Italy attaches the utmost importance.

Italy fully subscribes to the statement delivered by the representative of France as presidency of the European Union.

The first message we wish to bring to the membership's attention in this open debate is that, even though the Security Council's action has started to produce results, we are far from achieving the necessary protection for children caught in armed conflicts around the world. Such an ambitious goal clearly requires a renewed and concerted effort by the international community as a whole. The Security Council has indeed an essential role to play and is engaged in fulfilling its responsibilities, particularly through the intensive efforts of its Working Group, which is very well coordinated and chaired by France.

We recognize that the Secretary-General, his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the Executive Director of UNICEF, and representatives of other relevant United Nations agencies, as well as many important non-governmental organizations working in that field, are providing a major contribution towards the goal we set out to achieve through the monitoring and reporting mechanisms created under resolution 1612 (2005). We particularly welcome the synergies between the activities of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, such as the fact-finding mission to Afghanistan just referred to, and the steps taken by UNICEF to resume its activities and projects in countries such as Iraq.

On the other hand, we believe it essential that all the relevant actors of the international community — including the Governments of the countries involved, the donor countries and the multilateral institutions — join in the support and assistance to that fundamental United Nations-driven endeavour. Italy will continue to support programmes and projects aimed at the rehabilitation and reinsertion into society of child soldiers and children whose lives have been affected by armed conflicts, as it has been doing for several years, both bilaterally and through the European Union.

Outstanding efforts have already been undertaken by the United Nations, but we should acknowledge that much more remains to be done. For instance, while deploying a growing number of child protection advisers in our United Nations missions around the world, we still have not developed appropriate child protection training modules for our United Nations peacekeepers. Such training modules need to be approved and extensively applied. By doing this, we will help the United Nations address the unacceptable occurrences of sexual abuse by United Nations personnel and peacekeepers. This is something that is now long overdue, and Italy is ready to support the United Nations in any possible way in developing essential training modules.

We must also strive to mainstream child protection at all points in the peace process. Child protection must be an integral part of peace agreements and a priority of the United Nations in dealing with post-conflict scenarios and reconstruction programmes. Italy believes that only if we safeguard fundamental rights, such as access to water and health services, can children in armed conflicts be assured adequate physical protection and social reintegration.

As the scope and effectiveness of the role of the United Nations in addressing the plight of children continue to increase, Italy believes that the time has now come to start working on a new Security Council resolution on children and armed conflict. Such a resolution would allow us to factor in all the numerous lessons learned and the developments ensuing from the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005).

We believe that one very important and significant development regarding the protection of children in armed conflicts has been the recent

adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1820 (2008), on sexual violence in armed conflicts, which Italy is proud of having sponsored. That significant and far-reaching resolution acknowledges that sexual violence is now one of the primary threats to children in situations of armed conflict. This is what the children themselves have been clearly telling us, time and again.

Once the monitoring and reporting mechanisms are fully implemented in all countries involved, it will be time for the United Nations, and in particular the Security Council, to consider sexual violence — and not only the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts — as an additional trigger for action.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): Let me thank you, Your Excellency, for having organized this open debate on children and armed conflict and for being here to chair it today, which I think underscores the importance of this issue to us all. I would like to add our thanks to the French delegation, and in particular to Ambassador Ripert, for the excellent French leadership of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

It was very good also to hear from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, from the representative of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and from the Executive Director of UNICEF. We pay tribute to the work that they have done in raising the profile of this issue and in rehabilitating some of the children; we have heard a number of very uplifting examples today. I would like, however, to concentrate particularly on the valuable and high-quality work of the Special Representative; I think we all owe her and her team a great debt for the way she has gone about addressing this issue, and we look forward to working with her in future.

I would like to use this occasion also to recognize the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups on the ground. They often operate at great personal risk to their members, and without their support this mechanism could not operate half as effectively as it does. So, I would like to thank Ms. Kathleen Hunt, who represents the NGO community, for all the work that NGOs do.

It was very good to hear from the Secretary-General this morning. I think that, again, underscores the importance of this issue. One element of the Secretary-General's statement stuck in my mind: his plea that we keep this issue placed above politics. That cannot be said too often or too strenuously, particularly against the background of the Security Council Working Group not having always dealt with these issues as expeditiously or as comprehensively as it might.

I welcome Ambassador Ripert's annual report. We were pleased to see the range of situations covered by the Working Group over the past years. There have been a number of positive developments — and we have already heard about those from previous speakers — but, obviously, there are also many serious challenges remaining. I would like to highlight just a few of those.

In the occupied Palestinian territories and in Israel, the number of children killed or injured increased in the first quarter of 2008. Children are victims of attacks on schools, and denial of humanitarian access by anti-Government elements in Afghanistan and the use of explosive devices have also led to an increase in the number of children killed or injured. Children who had been released in Nepal were then forcibly returned to cantonment areas under the control of the Communist Party of Nepal. And in Chad children in conflict areas continue to be victims of killings, maimings, recruitment and sexual violence, and humanitarian access remains difficult. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) continue to recruit children, and for the fifth time in a row have been included in an annex to the Secretary-General's report (S/2007/757). We would also welcome from the Special Representative, at some point, further details on progress made in the development and implementation of the action plan of parties within Burma, and we urge the Myanmar Government to adhere to its commitment to the Special Representative to cooperate in establishing a monitoring and reporting mechanism.

Those examples illustrate the fact that the problems we are dealing with are widespread and affect many of the issues that the Security Council deals with day to day.

We have heard from previous speakers about the six grave violations: the continuing recruitment and use of children in armed conflict; the killing or maiming of children; rape and other sexual violence; abduction; denial of humanitarian access to children; and attacks against schools and hospitals by parties to armed

conflict. Words are easy, and we should all spend some time imagining just what happens when such violations are committed, and the effects that they must have on the children involved.

The Security Council was able to show great leadership recently through resolution 1820 (2008), on women and peace and security. I think we all recognize that in conflict women and children suffer disproportionately. The United Kingdom stands ready to contribute to a review of the violations which trigger the listing of a party in the annexes of the Secretary-General's reports. It is also important that such crimes not go unpunished. We support the role of the International Criminal Court, on its tenth anniversary, in investigating and prosecuting these and other violations and abuses against children in armed conflict that fall within its jurisdiction. We welcome the fact that several individuals who are alleged to have committed such crimes have been brought to justice.

I would also like to pick up on what previous speakers said about the Security Council's work on children and armed conflict having an impact on the ground. The implementation of resolution 1612 (2005) has generated progress, which has resulted in the release of children and their reintegration back into their families and communities. We believe that inclusive community-based programming is central to the success of children's reintegration. It is also clear that we need to promote a broad-based approach to this problem: we need to deal with development, humanitarian, security and human rights issues together.

My Government is encouraged by the work carried out by the monitoring and reporting mechanism. We welcome the resulting information reported to the Security Council in specific situations. Children's participation is fundamental to making monitoring and reporting more effective, and we hope, in this respect, that the monitoring and reporting mechanism can be made more accessible to children. We believe we can achieve this by involving children in its design and implementation at the country level.

We would like to use this occasion to urge all members of the Security Council to continue to cooperate fully within the Working Group and to ensure that the Group continues to adopt concrete conclusions and to propose effective recommendations for consideration and, where appropriate, implementation by the Security Council, including through the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and with respect to political issues.

The United Kingdom strongly believes that the Security Council and its Working Group should make full use of the range of options available for addressing systematic violations; these are set out in resolution 1612 (2005) and in the Working Group's tool kit. Monitoring of the implementation of the Working Group's recommendations is also vital.

Finally, the international community must be prepared to take action against those individuals and groups who commit egregious violations and refuse to undertake the remedial action we demand of them. The Working Group of the Council is an important tool at our disposal, one that could be extremely effective. Let us aim to use it that way, with the goal of making a real difference to the lives not just of individual children but of large groups of them in all the countries affected.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First and foremost, Sir, may I extend a welcome to you in the Council and express the honour and satisfaction we feel at seeing you chairing this important debate, the theme of which is of great significance to us. Likewise, we wish to acknowledge the Secretary-General's contribution and those of the other staff members who have addressed us. We also acknowledge and appreciate the role that they play in dealing with the question of children and armed conflict.

Including the item of children and armed conflict on the Council's agenda reflects a clear evolution in what we nowadays define as a threat to peace. Beyond that, the work of the Council on the issue has made it possible to raise the world's awareness of the plight of children in situations of armed conflict and their rights in such situations.

However, the Council has dedicated its work almost exclusively to six grave violations and their respective recommendations, when the issue should, in fact, be viewed more broadly without divorcing the rights of children in armed conflict from the rights of all children in general. The Council and its Working Group must examine the issue in depth, lest we squander an entire generation and jeopardize those that follow.

Panama views with enormous concern the fact that, notwithstanding the headway made in international standards on the protection of the rights of the child, those children continue to be deprived of their rights during armed conflicts, in which they are compelled to take part or become victims of unspeakable atrocities. Those children are deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the most sacred treasures of childhood, namely, a future and hope, and their frustration and despair are such that violence and the resurgence of conflict inevitably ensue.

That trend is especially manifest in children displaced by conflict. Unlike refugees, they are bereft of any international legal status, and consequently there is no guardianship of their rights if the institutions of the State do not have the necessary resources to protect them. Therefore, it is imperative to create reintegration programmes and policies with a special emphasis on the status of children as subjects of law, on the specific needs of victims and the education of the communities, with a view to forgiving child soldiers and reintegrating them into their societies.

The international community must tackle even more urgently a global situation that makes the effects of conflict on vulnerable populations even more adverse. The food crisis today threatens to exacerbate the already meagre levels of child nutrition. The United Nations, standing for the citizenry of the world, must set itself up as the prime advocate in redressing that gap. Its success will depend on the coordination amongst its own bodies, agencies and funds, as well as cooperation with Governments, non-governmental organizations and the efforts of local communities.

It is difficult to broach the question of children and armed conflict without referring to the necessity of putting an end to impunity. My delegation reiterates its support for the efforts of the International Criminal Court to bring to justice all those who perpetrate grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, in particular the rights of the child.

Furthermore, Panama considers that in situations of armed conflict, for which there are sanctions committees, this Council should add to the list of individuals subject to sanctions those guilty of grave violations against the rights of the child.

Mr. Grauls (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): The Council has addressed the issue of children in armed conflict on a number of occasions. Today's debate, for which I would like to thank the President, is a timely occasion to take stock of the work accomplished by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, established under resolution 1612 (2005).

Belgium aligns itself with the statement made by my French colleague speaking on behalf of the European Union.

The 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute and the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) leads me to place particular emphasis on the fight against impunity, an aspect that was addressed in the statement made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as by other speakers.

Mr. President, as you have noted in your concept paper, the issue of children in armed conflict requires a multidimensional approach. Our delegation has often underscored the fact that this is not only a human rights, humanitarian or development aid issue, but also an issue concerning peace and security. The Council Working Group has made it possible to carry out structural monitoring of all conflict situations where children are being recruited or used by armed forces or groups.

The Working Group's annual report gives us a very comprehensive overview of the range of activities that the Group has undertaken. In that context, it is important that we recall the need to provide the Working Group with the necessary support so as to enable it to continue to pursue its activities in an effective, transparent and efficient manner.

Belgium has always favoured an approach based on dialogue and partnership, but the situation in the field must change first. The operational conclusions adopted by the Working Group serve as an important tool in assisting and calling on the parties to conflict to put an end to child recruitment and to the serious violations perpetrated against children. In the absence of any positive response from the relevant parties, the Council must shoulder its responsibilities and adopt targeted sanction measures.

We must acknowledge that, in spite of the numerous appeals launched by the international community and the repeated commitments made by States, the number of children affected by armed conflict remains alarmingly high. In that regard, the

fight against impunity must remain our guiding principle. If we wish to eradicate the practice, all individuals guilty of committing crimes against children must be tried and sentenced, as it is only through systematic sentencing and bringing to justice of perpetrators that we will be able to change mentalities and put an end to the suffering of children affected by armed conflict.

With the establishment of the International Criminal Court, the international community now has available to it adequate legal instruments to try and punish the most serious crimes that have been committed, in particular against children. The International Criminal Court will also make it possible to ensure that those individuals who are involved in recruitment and enlistment of children are no longer able to do so. Celebrating the adoption of the Rome Statute of the ICC today, we must recall the primordial role that the Court can play in fighting impunity and preventing those intolerable practices.

Mr. Jurica (Croatia): At the outset, allow me to thank the Vietnamese presidency of the Security Council for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict. I would like to thank you, Sir, for personally chairing it.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by our French colleague on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make some comments in my national capacity.

Croatia welcomes the strengthened engagement of the Security Council in addressing violations against children in armed conflict. The establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanisms pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005) and the creation of the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict have raised the profile of children affected by armed conflict to the international level and have undoubtedly contributed to the reduction in the recruitment of children by parties to conflict. We commend the efforts and achievements of the Working Group, which is efficiently chaired by French Ambassador Ripert.

However, resolution 1612 (2005) also deals with a further five grave violations against children that have not been adequately addressed in the mechanisms to which I have referred. There needs to be an extension of the application of the monitoring and reporting mechanisms to include all six grave violations in all situations identified in both annexes contained in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2007/757).

Another positive development was the recent adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), which demands the immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians, with immediate effect. That resolution should contribute significantly to the safety of children in armed conflict. The scope of its impact will be evident by 30 June 2009, by which time the Secretary-General has been requested to submit a report to the Council on its implementation.

In spite of the positive achievements by the United Nations system and the international community as a whole, the situation on the ground demands continued and stronger Security Council action in order to ensure that all parties to armed conflict act in compliance with the relevant resolutions of the Council and other international instruments developed to protect children in armed conflict.

In order to contribute to a long-term and sustained solution to the issues of children in armed conflict, the United Nations and the international community at large must ensure that adequate resources and funding are available to support national strategies or action plans in the area of child protection and welfare, as well as community-based programmes. As reported by various non-governmental organizations, the latter is the key to the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers.

Successful reintegration requires long-term, adequate and sufficient funding of community-based programmes in order to prevent recruitment, child prostitution, stigma, discrimination and involvement in criminal activities. Moreover, children should be allowed access to benefits without having to identify themselves as ex-child soldiers, since many children are associated with armed forces and groups in other equally harmful ways.

By giving children education and skills training in the areas that a community needs, we will help them to become constructive members of those communities, which will hopefully more readily accept and value them in the future. By giving all children affected by armed conflict access to those beneficial programmes, there will be less likelihood of resentment against

former child soldiers and those associated with armed forces and groups.

Croatia strongly supports the work of child protection advisers throughout all Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department for Political Affairs missions, as well as United Nations mission personnel guarding camps for displaced persons. As the report of the Secretary-General points out, it has become evident that such camps have become recruiting grounds for child soldiers.

The Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups represent the latest policy on that issue. Croatia believes that they in particular deserve to be internationally recognized and universally applied. We urge all parties to armed conflict to stop using child soldiers and to start acting in compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, including the Paris Principles.

We urge Governments to end impunity for perpetrators accused of committing violations against children in armed conflict. We believe that there is a need to refer those violations to the International Criminal Court in cases where national systems fail to address them, as proposed by the Secretary-General.

In order to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of the programmatic response to the release, rehabilitation and reintegration of all children associated with armed forces and armed groups, the Security Council and the international community as a whole need to adopt a broad strategy of conflict prevention that addresses the root cause of armed conflict in a comprehensive manner. By promoting sustainable development, poverty eradication, national reconciliation, good governance, democracy, the rule of law and respect for and protection of human rights, we will ensure the protection of children on a long-term basis. We will ensure that they have a future.

Mr. Wang Guangya (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank you, Sir, for coming to New York to preside over this meeting. I would also like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Radhika Coomaraswamy and UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman for their briefings.

China is deeply concerned about violations committed against children in armed conflicts in some countries. China opposes the recruitment and use of child soldiers and other violations of the rights and interests of children in armed conflict. We support the various efforts of the United Nations, including those of the Security Council, to promote the protection of children in armed conflict. I should like to take this opportunity to emphasize the following.

First, the Security Council should stay focused on its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Armed conflict inevitably hurts and affects children and other vulnerable groups. By working to prevent, reduce or resolve conflicts at the grassroots level, the Security Council will be able to provide children with the best protection it can. That is far more meaningful and effective than remedial measures taken in the aftermath of conflict. A look at reality this year shows that, while many children in Afghanistan and other regions have become the victims of armed conflict as a result of the deterioration of the security situation, positive progress in the peace processes in Côte d'Ivoire and other regions has brought hope to children there. That is yet further proof of the need for the Security Council to pay more attention to the issue of armed conflict per se.

Secondly, in addressing the issue of children and armed conflict, the role of the Government concerned should always be respected and supported. Resolution 1612 (2005) stresses the primary responsibility of the Government concerned for the protection of children and the need for other parties to cooperate with the Government in its efforts. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict should increase communication with the Governments concerned, acknowledge and support its positive measures and continue to enhance mutual confidence so as to avoid politicizing the question of children and interfering in the internal affairs of the countries concerned under the pretext of protecting children. The Secretariat should also strengthen communication and cooperation with the Governments concerned to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of its information and to improve the quality of its reports.

Thirdly, continued efforts are needed to improve the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the proceedings of the Working Group on the basis of resolution 1612 (2005). Progress has been made with regard to collecting information since the monitoring and reporting mechanism went into operation.

However, in many countries and regions the mechanism is still in its initial stage and need to be constantly improved in practice. Impatience and haste should therefore be avoided. Under the coordination of France as its chair, the Working Group has considered the question of children in a number of countries. The Chinese delegation hopes that the Working Group, with continued professionalism and objectivity, will be able to find solutions to the relevant issues through cooperation with the Governments concerned and constructive consultations, and put forward useful proposals to the Security Council. The Chinese delegation supports the Working Group in its continued efforts to consider its working methods in order to improve its efficiency and transparency.

China is always opposed to the wilful use or threat of sanctions by the Security Council and believes that the issue of sanctions should be approached with even greater caution when it comes to the question of children and armed conflict. Situations vary from conflict to conflict and cannot all be treated aiike or addressed with a one-size-fits-all approach. The Chinese delegation once again calls upon all parties to armed conflict to truly honour their obligations, comply with international humanitarian law and respect and protect the rights of children. In promoting post-conflict reconstruction, the international community should give priority to the reintegration of children into their families, schools and communities and provide sufficient resources to guarantee the achievement of that goal.

Efforts by the Security Council alone are not enough to resolve the question of children and armed conflict. We encourage UNICEF, the World Bank and other international agencies to play a greater role in helping the countries concerned to prevent the involvement of children in armed conflict. We also welcome the positive role played by non-governmental organizations in that regard.

Having ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, China is now a party to the Protocol. We call for the ratification of and accession to the Protocol by more countries. It is our hope that all parties will make efforts to truly improve the situation of children in armed conflict and give them the beautiful future that they deserve.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): Allow me first to join others in thanking Viet Nam, our fellow Association of Southeast Asian Nations member, for initiating this very important meeting. We are pleased to see you, Sir, presiding over this debate and we are certain that, under your able stewardship, this meeting will arrive at a successful outcome.

We also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his statement and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Coomaraswamy, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Mullet, Executive Director Veneman and Ms. Hunt for their respective important statements. My delegation would also like to express our support for Ambassador Ripert of France, Chairman of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, for his statement and his leadership of the Working Group.

The issue that brings us together today is an essential tragedy of conflict situations — the tragedy of the youngest victims. From Palestine to Iraq, from Afghanistan to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere, children are casualties and victims of war. The plight of children in armed conflict continues to grip this Council.

With thousands of children bearing arms as child soldiers and countless others thought to be affected in other ways, children also suffer from the spread of diseases and underdevelopment in armed conflicts. While thousands of children die every year in direct fighting, malnutrition and disease also claim many lives. Efforts to protect former child soldiers and child victims should therefore be conducted beyond the framework of security or rights-based issues. Indonesia has been steadfast in its position that this issue should also be discussed within the framework of the social, economic and development frameworks.

Often separated from their families and living in the squalid conditions in war zones, those children are greatly in need of psychological as well as physical intervention. Childhood, then, becomes a nightmare in which they are separated from parents and family, their homes are destroyed, health and education services are disrupted and trust is undermined. Watching parents being murdered, raped or tortured or being threatened themselves puts extreme pressure on children's' coping mechanisms, manifesting in extreme anxiety and insomnia and difficulty functioning in school or depression.

The international donor community must therefore continue to provide long-term and sustainable assistance to facilitate the full recovery of children. Such assistance should and must be provided without political preconditions. Wherever and whenever there are children affected by armed conflict, we should devote our full energy and passion to assisting them. Our political aspirations and ideological differences should not prevent the attainment of our common objective.

Such assistance will require an approach that includes development and humanitarian dimensions, undergirded by the political will of States. In that regard, the United Nations Development Programme and its development partners, as well as UNICEF and the World Health Organization, must be continuously engaged to increase their development and humanitarian initiatives that help countries in need.

With the growing complexity and intricacy of world affairs, the United Nations is surely not in a position to tackle the entirety of the issue of protection of children. We therefore recognize the pivotal role that can be provided by regional organizations in addressing the multifaceted aspects of the issue. In addition, we also welcome and commend the increasing role of non-governmental organizations, such as the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, and other civil society organizations.

However, we strongly believe that the best protection from armed conflict is in preventing it and addressing its sources at their roots. That should be done in the context of peace processes, as stipulated by resolution 1612 (2005). Thus the Security Council, as mandated by the Charter, must continuously promote peace processes so that those children can be protected.

As a newly established body, the Working Group must continue to update, refine and strengthen its working methods. For that reason, we cannot but commend the efforts of the Working Group to improve its working methods in order to maintain its impartiality, transparency, accountability, inclusivity and constructive cooperation with the countries concerned.

In addition, the Working Group should provide clear guidelines on how to define a clear strategy for countries or parties to be de-listed from the annexes. While demands to parties to armed conflict must be fully monitored and reported, it is equally pertinent that clear, objective and measurable guidelines be in place.

Finally, let us not, as Special Representative Coomaraswamy has said, allow children to be the forgotten and neglected victims of the fighting and put future generations at risk. Let us work towards a world in which there is more humanity, more caring and more gentleness and in which children are valued and protected, starting here with this Council and its initiatives. To conclude, allow me to therefore assure the Council of our full support for the adoption of the draft presidential statement on this very important matter.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): My first words will be simply to warmly welcome you, Sir. Allow me also to thank you for having proposed this debate on an issue that, although it has been discussed recently, nonetheless remains an urgent and timely topic.

The regular consideration of this issue bears witness to the vigilance and earnestness with which the Council, in conjunction with the international community, addresses that grave scourge. It is obvious that, without that collective commitment on our part, the scourge will continue to wreak havoc around the globe through its frightening manifestations, including the abduction, recruitment and enrolment of children; attacks against schools; and above all sexual violence against children, particular rape, which has reached very disturbing proportions; not to mention the other aspects of a humanitarian nature and the very adverse impact that this problem has on development.

The situation of children in armed conflict first requires the recognition that children's rights need to be protected. States bear paramount responsibility for that protection, followed, according to the same duties and obligations, by the other parties to the conflict.

It is therefore essential to invest the bulk of our efforts towards inculcating the rule of law and bolstering democratic institutions. Since those norms effectively place human beings, as well as respect for human values, at the heart of society, the rights of the child are already guaranteed in a democratic system. That is why all States are duty-bound to become parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

The contributions of United Nations agencies and other partners operating in the field are also necessary. To that end, we would encourage the popularization of international humanitarian law and educational outreach regarding the rights of the child, with a view to creating an environment conducive to the well-being and prosperity of children. However, as Ms. Veneman, the Executive Director of UNICEF, so rightly said, the best way to protect children from armed conflict is to prevent war itself, which is our collective responsibility.

Although the prospects of totally eradicating that scourge affecting child soldiers are still remote, we hope to achieve the objectives of resolution 1612 (2005). The results already obtained, such as the implementation of action plans, the prosecution before competent courts of commanders who enlist children, the reduction and even cessation of child recruitment in certain cases, the release and reintegration of children into their communities are, from that standpoint, extremely encouraging. With respect to that problem, we take this opportunity to congratulate Côte d'Ivoire and Sri Lanka on the example that they have set in this field.

We invite armed groups and forces, the names of which appear in the annex of the Secretary-General's report (S/2007/757), to demobilize children in their ranks and to facilitate their reintegration into their respective communities and families.

The best guarantee of successful reintegration would be the adoption of measures to prevent any recurrence of the problem through appropriate education and the training of these children in income-generating activity with a view to making them independent once and for all. Such action can be carried out, however, only if it is firmly supported, particularly by donors and all national and international structures with competencies in this field.

To conclude, I wish to congratulate the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Executive Director of UNICEF, the Chairperson of the Watchlist Steering Committee, the entire United Nations system, the donors and France, naturally, as well as the Working Group it chairs, for their leadership, their constant efforts and their commitment to this titanic endeavour.

Finally, I would like to say that we have taken note of the draft presidential statement. Once we have seen it, we will have the chance consider it and, without a doubt, to support it wholeheartedly.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this debate. We also thank Ambassador Ripert, the Permanent Representative of France and Chairman of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for the presentation of the Working Group's annual report. We also thank his delegation for its work and devotion to the issue before us, as well as for the leadership role that France has played.

We are also grateful for the comments made by the Secretary-General, by Ms. Coomaraswamy, the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, the Executive Director of UNICEF and Ms. Hunt.

Armed conflicts are a fertile breeding ground for the violation of each and every one of children's rights. To date, we have focused on the direct consequences of those conflicts on childhood. However, in the future we must work just as effectively to combat other violations of their rights. We must pay closer attention to the indirect consequences of conflicts, the harmful effects of which often grow into major obstacles that thwart the promise of a better future, even in a post-conflict period.

The timely convening of this debate allows us to repeat our call for a review of the criteria of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. That would allow us to consider, in a more appropriate and efficient manner, each of the six grave violations identified in resolution 1612 (2005).

The recent progress made by the Council on issues such as sexual violence, as enshrined in the landmark resolution 1820 (2008), should be adequately reflected in the approach that the Working Group applies to the issue. It is also crucial that we work very closely with the affected States in order resolutely to combat impunity. To that end, the Security Council should carry out an in-depth analysis of the actions and sanctions that it could apply to those who continue to recruit children and to commit other crimes against children.

Today, as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute, the time is right to also consider the complementary role that the

International Criminal Court can play in supporting States in their fight against impunity.

During the debate held on this issue in February, we expressed our commitment to addressing the numerous consequences of armed conflict on children, and we agreed on the need to address the root causes of such conflict through a broad and comprehensive preventive strategy.

Today, we agree with you, Sir, that the United Nations should more fully tackle the problem of children and armed conflict. It should implement a broader protection strategy. The loss of basic services, such as access to drinking water, sanitation, health care and education, as well as the rise in child mortality, illiteracy and malnutrition, to name just a few, perpetuate the vicious circle, which then becomes the cause and consequence of conflicts. We have continually warned that global inequity and our neglect of the extreme poverty in which one fifth of humankind currently lives are factors that largely contribute towards creating a fertile breeding ground for conflict. That lack of equity and neglect of situations of poverty are also factors that punish children in particular.

The reintegration and rehabilitation of children associated with armed groups should be an indispensable component of that broader protection strategy, in particular in those cases where the marginalization of certain groups is a factor contributing to conflict.

The reintegration process should help children to establish new foundations in their lives and should restore the opportunities snatched away from them by conflict for their physical, emotional and intellectual development. A truly effective integration and rehabilitation process should be inclusive, community-based and designed to help rebuild emotional trust between children and their families and to promote peace, security and stability in their communities, preventing ostracism and the stigmatization of those who have been the victims of child recruitment.

It is essential to provide educational and vocational opportunities in order to prevent former child soldiers from being re-recruited, as occurs with some frequency. The new educational and vocational opportunities must ensure greater socio-economic well-being for the family. Particularly for children who have been removed from armed groups, education in times of conflict is much more than a path towards employment, as it is aimed at normalizing their lives and helping them to develop a new identity, separate from that of child soldiers.

The challenge for us all is not only to put a definitive end to child recruitment and other grave violations, but also and above all to channel children's energies, ideas and dreams in a positive way that can contribute to the creation of a new post-conflict society.

Mr. Mubarak (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to thank you, Sir, for convening and personally presiding over this open debate on children and armed conflict. We would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy; the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Ann Veneman; and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Edmond Mullet, for their excellent presentations.

Despite the efforts made over the past six months at the regional and international levels, with the leading role played by the United Nations, we have yet to see tangible progress regarding the situation of children in armed conflict. Children continue to be recruited and sometimes re-recruited as combatants, and boys and girls continue to fall victim to acts of violation, rape, murder, maiming and arbitrary detention committed by parties to conflict in various regions, despite the repeated appeals made to those parties by the Security Council and the General Assembly to abide by the rules established under international law and the Geneva Conventions.

We are concerned by the persistent phenomenon of the recruitment and re-recruitment of child soldiers in situations of armed conflict. Despite the statements made by many parties to conflict reaffirming their commitment to establishing monitoring and reporting mechanisms, cooperation to that end has been insufficient. Therefore, we must urge all parties concerned to prevent child recruitment, to release all recruited children and to ensure their reintegration through appropriate development programmes. We call on the international financial institutions and donors to fund such programmes in countries affected by or emerging from conflict so that they can reintegrate

those children by providing them with regular incomes, thus preventing their re-recruitment.

As a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol, my country deplores the fact that, in some countries affected by armed conflict, all too many children are subjected to rape or sexual harassment by parties to the conflicts and even by personnel of peacekeeping operations. In that connection, my country supports the zero-tolerance policy of the United Nations regarding acts of sexual violence. Once they have been found guilty of such heinous acts, the perpetrators must be punished. My delegation urges all countries to enforce their national laws criminalizing such practices and to combat and put an end to impunity.

Libya wishes to express its deep concern about the children suffering in the occupied Palestinian territories. In recent years, Israeli military operations have claimed the lives of more than 800 Palestinian children. Thousands have been displaced by the destruction of their families' homes. Palestinian children have also been affected by the racist separation wall built in the occupied territory, which has prevented thousands of them from attending school. As for Gaza, which is in a state of siege, its suffering is indescribable.

We must also recall the suffering of children in Iraq and Afghanistan. In a number of press statements, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has described the tragic situation that continues to face the children in those countries, including the fact that many have been killed or maimed as a result of car bombs, explosive belts, improvised explosive devices or bombings of schools and hospitals in occupied areas. In addition, many children are subject to arbitrary detention and deprived of their most fundamental rights, including the right to education and freedom of movement. Such acts are illegal, and we call on the coalition forces to rectify them and to release those children unconditionally.

In conclusion, we wish to thank the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for all its efforts to address issues related to children in situations of armed conflict. We hope that the Working Group will refrain from taking a selective approach and from politicization in formulating its recommendations. We would like to take this opportunity to draw the Council's attention to the remarkable role played by UNICEF in protecting children, not only in conflict areas, but also in countries requiring food and development assistance.

Finally, Sir, we would like to thank your country once again. We shall support the draft presidential statement to be issued at the close of this meeting.

Mr. Shcherbak (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to welcome you, Sir, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, to the presidency of the Security Council. We are grateful to our friends and colleagues from the Vietnamese delegation for the painstaking preparation of this meeting and the arduous work that they have performed in this regard. We are also grateful to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his participation in this important meeting. We are also grateful to Ms. Coomaraswamy, Mr. Mullet, Ms. Veneman and Ms. Hunt for the timely information they have provided and welcome their activities in trying to shield children from the horrors of war. We pay tribute to the selflessness and personal courage of both the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who has carried out productive visits to hot spots, and the UNICEF staff and other humanitarian personnel working in such places on a permanent basis.

The Russian Federation views the securing of the rights of children as a priority and is actively working to that end. On 26 June of this year, the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Dmitry Medvedev, signed a law on the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child relating to the involvement of children in armed conflict. This step was a further demonstration of Russia's commitment to strict compliance with international legal norms and standards and of our own meaningful contribution to the United Nations campaign to widen the scale of the obligations States sign on to in the human rights and humanitarian fields.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is nearing universal ratification, and its Optional Protocols are important international instruments in the field of protection of children, including in the context of armed conflict. We enjoin those States that have not yet acceded to them to do so as a matter of urgency.

The task of protecting children in conflicts and securing their normal life in the post-conflict period is system-wide in nature and needs a consolidated

approach on the part of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Peacebuilding Commission, the Human Rights Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and its functional committees alike. This issue must be the focus of attention of human rights treaty bodies, first and foremost, the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

It is important not only to tackle the tragic consequences of conflict but also to direct efforts at preventing them. An important factor in this regard is the achievement of harmony between civilizations and the eradication of extremism in whatever soil it may spring from.

We restate our support for the Secretary-General's appeal to pay due attention to all serious violations of the rights of children in conflicts, including not only the use of child soldiers, but the remaining five categories of violations as well. We feel that such crimes should not remain unpunished. We feel that the killing and maiming of minors may stand alongside their recruitment as a criterion for including parties to armed conflict in the well-known annexes to the Secretary-General's reports on this issue.

Specific long-term measures must be adopted to rehabilitate the afflicted children and to reintegrate them into society. It is extremely important in this regard to create the conditions for children and young people to receive a continuous and full-fledged education as well as for children to have access to comprehensive medical care.

Resolution 1612 (2005) is an important benchmark for practical work to protect children. In order to ensure that this activity is of high quality, it is necessary for the monitoring and reporting mechanism to function to the full in all situations that give rise to concern, first and foremost those on the Security Council agenda, and for it to provide to the Council up-to-date, objective and reliable information. We approve the report of the Chairman of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/2008/455), and we welcome the readiness of the Group to improve its working methods in order to enhance its effectiveness and impartiality.

We share the concern of United Nations bodies, the Secretariat management and its specialized units with respect to the deteriorating situation of children in Afghanistan and Iraq. Unlike a number of other situations, the suffering of children in these conflicts does not receive proper attention by the Security Council and other United Nations bodies and does not elicit appropriate measures from them. We are convinced of the need for the swiftest deployment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism in those countries. We stress the responsibility of all parties, including the multinational forces, to ensure the safety of the civilian populations, first and foremost children, as well as strict compliance with the norms of international humanitarian law. We resolutely condemn the killing and maiming of children, where as the result of premeditated attacks or as a result of indiscriminate and excessive use of force. We feel that it is unacceptable for hundreds of children to continue to be held in the military prisons of multinational forces on arbitrary charges and without access to civil justice. A number of other delegations have already referred to this situation as well.

It is impossible to secure the protection of children without cooperation from the Governments of countries in the grip of the conflicts or at the stage of post-conflict restoration. The United Nations and its Security Council must steer the international community towards providing meaningful support, first and foremost financial, for national measures to bolster this protection, to effectively implement demobilization and reintegration programmes for minors, and to create the socio-economic and legal conditions for prevention of recruitment of children and other crimes against them.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): We too commend the delegation of Viet Nam for organizing this open thematic debate on children and armed conflict. We particularly wish to thank the Deputy Prime Minister for coming to New York to preside over our meeting today. We thank all those who have participated earlier on in this debate, but we particularly wish to highlight the efforts of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and thank her for the work that she has been doing for children around the world.

In 1996, Graça Machel compiled the first report on children affected by armed conflict (A/51/306.Add.1). Since the release of her report, significant progress has been made in the development of international legal and policy frameworks for the protection of children in armed conflict. Of importance are the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child relating to the

involvement of children in armed conflict, the Statute of the International Criminal Court and Security Council resolutions that address the issue of children and armed conflict thematically or in country-specific situations. In addition, the 2007 Paris Commitments to protect children unlawfully recruited or used by armed forces or armed groups provides a children's rights approach to programming.

Despite these developments, children remain the worst affected population group, since parties to armed conflict continue to commit egregious violations against them. The Security Council has identified six grave violations committed against children in armed conflict that my delegation believes require equal weight and attention by the Council. These six violations are the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in violation of applicable international law, killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abductions, denial of humanitarian access to children, and attacks on schools and hospitals by parties to armed conflict.

There is still much to be done to protect children from these grave violations. However, we are encouraged by the fact that the active involvement of the Security Council on the issue of children and armed conflict has been translated into concrete results. Today, a number of parties to armed conflict, though not many, have formal action plans in place to halt recruitment and identify and release children from their forces. We remain optimistic that more action plans might be prepared in the coming months.

Efforts to include specific provisions relating to children in peace processes and agreements are beginning to gain momentum. It is important that provisions such as the release of children and reintegration into their communities be included at all stages of peace negotiations and in the final documents of peace agreements. The incorporation of child protection requirements in United Nations peacekeeping mandates, including through the appointment of child-protection advisers, has become more systematic.

Since 2005, the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict has reviewed reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict and made recommendations to the Council that have yielded some positive results on the ground. The Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, has been actively involved in eliciting concrete child protection commitments through her engagement with Governments, parties to conflict, United Nations partners and the international community. Her efforts are to be commended.

It is vital that we not forget the long-term needs of children that have been affected by armed conflict. Ensuring the well-being of those children is an ongoing process and therefore more attention should be paid to the reintegration and rehabilitation of children associated with armed forces and groups. Successful reintegration requires the participation of children themselves and their communities. Children identify safety, acceptance, being valued and having a future as central to their reintegration.

Furthermore, children identify education, skills training and equipping themselves to be constructive members of their community as essential for their continuing welfare. Successful reintegration is also dependent on the promotion of sustainable development and poverty eradication. In that regard, the international community should provide early support for economic growth in post-conflict situations and continue to provide resources for reintegration and rehabilitation programmes, as well as social services such as education and health care. Such assistance would ensure that children who have left armed forces and groups do not become re-recruited, but have a chance for a dignified future.

Lastly, special consideration of girls is needed when developing programmes for children associated with armed forces and groups. Girls often experience gender-based violence and discrimination during their recruitment or use and within communities to which they return. Therefore, it is important that reintegration and rehabilitation programmes include measures to address all forms of violence and discrimination against girls. United Nations agencies and civil society organizations on the ground should continue to make every effort to assist authorities to find and help such girls. Through such concerted efforts, we would ensure a better life for all children who have been affected by armed conflict.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Onemola (Nigeria): On behalf of the Nigerian delegation, I thank you, Sir, for convening

this open debate on children and armed conflict and for the concise concept paper circulated by your delegation. I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and illuminating reports on that subject. I also commend Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Edmund Mullet, Ann Veneman and Kathleen Hunt for their instructive and very candid briefings.

Nigeria considers the protection of children in armed conflict to be one of the most daunting humanitarian and security challenges facing the international community today. Despite stronger global action and reported progress in Côte d'Ivoire and, to a lesser extent, in Nepal, the Secretary-General noted in his recent reports the continued recruitment of child soldiers and grave violations against children, including killing, maiming, rape and the denial of humanitarian access. He also drew attention not only to the manipulation and coercion of children to participate in political demonstrations, strikes and roadblocks, but also to the increasing cross-border recruitment of children.

Nigeria finds that state of affairs intolerable and thus lends it full support to the country- or case-specific recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's latest reports on children and armed conflicts in Nepal, Somalia and Uganda. Nigeria believes that that those targeted measures would strengthen the implementation of existing norms and legal frameworks, while reinforcing the advocating and monitoring mechanisms on children in armed conflict. We therefore urge the parties to which those recommendations are addressed to fully implement them.

In lending our voice to the Secretary-General's targeted measures, Nigeria believes that political will and a firm commitment to the implementation of peace agreements are crucial to moving the child protection agenda forward, especially in Africa. As regards Somalia, we encourage the Government and factions in the country to commit fully to the implementation of the peace agreement signed on 9 June in Djibouti. Particularly, we encourage them to implement the recommendation that calls for an end to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and support the call on the Council to deploy a more robust peacekeeping force to the country to restore stability.

Regarding the need to ensure the rights and needs of all children, I would like to make five points..

First, Nigeria calls for a development-oriented approach to children and armed conflict. Such an approach would require greater attention to be paid to child-focused health care needs, rehabilitative care, education and the empowerment of women, families and communities to provide a secure environment for children.

Secondly, good governance, democracy and conflict prevention are vital to building a culture of peace and respect for human rights, including children's rights. My delegation therefore calls for the implementation of existing conflict prevention mechanisms in Africa to free resources for human and social development. Additionally, children's rights should be at the core of humanitarian, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.

Thirdly, Nigeria calls on the Council to strengthen and expand the scope of the existing monitoring and reporting mechanism and to take targeted measures against perpetrators who repeatedly violate children's rights.

Fourthly, Nigeria fully supports the role of the International Criminal Court in investigating and prosecuting such violations.

Fifthly, we call for greater collaboration between the African Union Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Council's Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict, and for the strengthening of the relationship between the United Nations and African civil society in monitoring children's rights in conflict and post-conflict situations.

As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child since 1991 and to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child since 2001, Nigeria believes that the need for the enhancement of collaborative efforts among the various international and regional frameworks for the protection of children in armed conflict ,can never be overemphasized. National programmes are nonetheless imperative. We have, through the Nigerian Child Rights Act, made remarkable progress in the implementation of international frameworks.

Children represent our collective posterity. Nigeria believes that it is incumbent on us to protect them. It is also our Charter obligation to do so.

Ensuring the rights and needs of children, not just the rights of child soldiers, requires the involvement of all Governments, international agencies and civil society actors.

Let me conclude by thanking the Working Group for the work it has done and by indicating the full support of the Nigerian delegation for the draft presidential statement on children and armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Chávez (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish at the outset to commend you, Mr. President, for having organized this debate on children and armed conflict. Peru is pleased to participate in today's meeting and to contribute to efforts to protect children. My delegation welcomes the statements made by the Secretary-General, by Mr. Edmond Mullet, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and by Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF. We also welcome the presence of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and we commend her for all her work.

In addressing this issue, we must always remember the pain and suffering of tens of thousands of families ravaged by the many forms of violence that arise in situations of armed conflict and that, among other things, affect one of their key components: their children. The physical and psychological damage that armed conflict continues to do to thousands of children is very difficult if not impossible to repair. For that reason, Peru again forcefully condemns all acts of violence against children, especially those linked to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, abduction, maiming, killing, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as to the impeding of humanitarian access and to attacks against schools, hospitals and centres for refugees and internally displaced persons — all of which affect children.

It is the responsibility of every State affected by violence to prevent such suffering by children and to endeavour to reduce the number of victims to the lowest possible level. Peru firmly believes that States, especially those affected by armed conflict, should continue to adopt measures within their respective legal systems to try those responsible for the recruitment and use of children in conflict and other serious crimes against children. Amnesty and impunity are unacceptable. In that regard, the work of international judicial bodies, in particular the International Criminal Court and special courts such as that created for Sierra Leone, is important.

The United Nations system and other international and regional organizations should cooperate with national efforts to prevent the violation of the human rights of minors and to provide support for victims. Significant steps have been taken in that regard, notably through the establishment of a variety of international mechanisms and instruments to put an end to violations of the human rights of children involved in armed conflict. But much remains to be done.

For its part, the Security Council should continue to develop and improve the ways and means at its disposal to prevent conflict situations that affect international peace and security from violating the rights of children. Here, it is important to continue working to ensure full compliance with resolution 1612 (2005). The Council should also continue to draw on the work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the monitoring and reporting mechanism. We call on all parties involved to continue and, as necessary, to enhance their cooperation with those mechanisms.

My delegation supports the possibility of the Security Council using targeted sanctions against those who violate international law with respect to children and armed conflict. In that regard, it is important to map out the process that would lead to the imposition of such sanctions.

My delegation reaffirms its support for the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his most recent report on children and armed conflict (S/2007/757) and calls on the Security Council and other bodies concerned to adopt them. Specifically, we agree with the Secretary-General that the Security Council should give equal weight to all categories of grave violations arising during armed conflict, not only the recruitment and use of child soldiers. My delegation will support any initiative in that regard.

We have seen in practice that there are limits on the demobilization of children in the midst of an armed conflict. But we know that when a conflict ends the recruitment and use of child soldiers also ends. We should therefore focus on the cessation of hostilities and the search for peaceful solutions as a direct way to

prevent the suffering of children in situations of armed conflict. The will of the parties to attain a viable and sustainable peace agreement is thus vital. The cases of Côte d'Ivoire and Nepal provide examples in that regard.

To guarantee sustainable peace we must tackle the causes of conflict. In many situations, these are closely linked to hunger, poverty and social exclusion. Policies aimed at sustainable development must therefore be the foundation of any process of peacebuilding. Moreover, it is important that the donor community provide long-term sustainable support for national efforts to ensure the disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers, along with the rehabilitation of children who did not participate in the conflict but were victims of it. Moreover, owing to their particular vulnerability and needs, it is necessary to focus particular attention on girls affected by armed conflict.

The future of our countries depends on our care and handling of the safety and security of our children. We firmly believe that, in pursuit of that objective, the prevention and eradication of armed conflict will guarantee lasting international peace and security based on respect for human rights, the rule of law, democracy, national reconciliation and sustainable development policies that will eliminate hunger and poverty and will address the structural causes that lie at the root of such conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Hill (Australia): I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. Australia remains deeply concerned about the plight of children affected by armed conflicts, and we remain dedicated to ensuring the protection of all children from harm and exploitation.

We welcome Council's adoption on 19 June of resolution 1820 (2008), recognizing that children in situations of armed conflict are vulnerable not only to recruitment as child soldiers but also to other grave violations, including rape and other acts of sexual violence. We echo the call in that resolution for all States to comply with their obligations regarding prosecuting persons responsible for acts of sexual violence.

Children in armed conflict and children displaced by conflict are vulnerable, as noted, not only to recruitment as child soldiers but also to other grave violations, including killing and maiming, abductions and attacks on schools and hospitals. They may also suffer as a result of the denial of humanitarian access. The United Nations system must continue to coordinate its efforts to address all these egregious violations, and monitoring and reporting mechanisms should be triggered when any of them occur.

Many of the parties who commit violations against children in situations of armed conflict have been cited repeatedly in reports of the Secretary-General. We encourage the Security Council to continue to call on relevant States to prepare time-bound action plans to stop violations against children and to consider targeted measures which may be taken against those persistent violators of child rights. On the tenth anniversary of its creation by the adoption of the Rome Statute, we also stress the important role of the International Criminal Court in investigating and prosecuting violations against children in armed conflict that fall within its jurisdiction.

We commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for her continued commitment to her mandate, and we welcome her recent efforts to shed light on the situation of children in Afghanistan. We encourage the Council to maintain attention and seek further progress on those areas where children continue to be affected by armed conflict, including in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia.

Australia welcomes the progress made on the issue and encourages all key stakeholders to continue their efforts to ensure that all children are protected from harm and exploitation and to hold those who would abuse them to account.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka): Let me thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate. Sri Lanka is particularly pleased to take the floor on this important issue under the guidance of the delegation of Viet Nam.

This meeting provides an opportunity to refocus our efforts in addressing the scourge of the recruitment and use of child combatants. The reports of the

Secretary-General on specific situations, as well as his annual report (S/2007/757), are informative and illustrative in that regard.

This debate takes place three years after the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005). The journey between that event and today has been marked by the establishment of monitoring and reporting task forces, the evaluation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, the adoption of the Paris Principles and Commitments and the 10-year review of the Graça Machel report (A/51/306). Those initiatives, together with the relevant international instruments, have helped strengthen the protection framework for children in armed conflict in its practical and normative aspects.

However, the threat of the recruitment and use of child combatants continues unabated and remains the primary concern. Therefore, current efforts in the Council in taking measures against persistent perpetrators of such crimes need to be intensified in a more realistic, practical and effective manner.

In that regard, Sri Lanka compliments the efforts made so far by the Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in recalibrating the monitoring and reporting mechanism. It is our hope that those efforts and measures adopted by the Working Group will eventually lead to the elimination of the pernicious offence of the recruitment and use of children for armed hostilities.

However, to achieve that end, it is important that the Council and the Working Group, at this point, remain essentially focused on this most urgent task in a more coherent manner and not seek to broaden the canvas to include other issues that are not of immediate practical benefit. Actions that make a difference on the ground should engage our attention in our effort to attain concerted international and national measures to bring perpetrators to justice.

In that context, let me offer some views on the issue on children and armed conflict for the consideration of the Council, the Working Group and the Secretary-General.

First, introducing under the Council mandate other categories and subcategories of violations against children without resolving the core issue of child recruitment would only make the Council process on children and armed conflict seem ineffective by missing the wood for the trees. Instead, the Council could, for instance, address issues more relevant to its work on peace and security, such as how armed actors resort to new tactics of recruitment to defy and mislead the international community, whose attention to the matter is based on existing norms.

We have observed that discernible trend in the north of Sri Lanka, where the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) subject schoolchildren to compulsory weapons and combat training with a view to enlisting them for active combat as and when the need arises. That is a new form of recruitment and use of child combatants adopted by the LTTE.

Secondly, it is important to underline that, as distinct from Member States, non-State actors are not bound by internationally enforceable legal instruments and, therefore, should be subjected to stricter scrutiny and more rigorous and internationally enforceable punitive measures so as to make them accountable for grave abuses against children.

Thirdly, since the primary responsibility for the protection of children under national and international legal instruments lies with the State, a zero-tolerance policy on recruitment and the use of children by any party whatsoever assumes greater significance as an obligation of a State. The Government of Sri Lanka has declared and followed such a policy consistently, with the corresponding commitment to address all abuses identified by resolution 1612 (2005) and other relevant national and international legal instruments.

Fourthly, the Council and the Working Group must agree on how to deal with persistent and recalcitrant violators in respect of situations listed in the Secretary-General's report (S/2007/757) and evolve a realistic approach to address the issue. In that regard, we support the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report calling for increased pressure against persistent and recalcitrant violators, including through effective targeted measures.

Fifthly, the most important of all the measures that underpin the effective implementation of 1612 (2005) is the reintegration of child combatants. They need special protection after having surrendered to national authorities or having been rescued from armed groups. As the Secretary-General suggests in his report, the successful reintegration of child combatants requires resources as well as expertise. It is imperative, therefore, that current international concern in this important area move beyond words of sympathy into

sustained engagement and the flow of necessary resources to facilitate effective reintegration. In that regard, the Paris Principles provide guidance towards a long-term self-sustaining effort that can also lead to peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Sri Lanka remains committed to working closely with the Council and the Working Group to rescue children trapped in situations of armed conflict, in the cause of making the world safer for children. With our rich, long-held tradition of promoting the welfare of children, including the provision of free health care and education from primary to tertiary level, we seek nothing less.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. McNee (Canada): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the delegation of Viet Nam for convening this important meeting. I would also like to thank particularly the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, for her informative statement this morning and for her very effective work in the cause of children affected by armed conflict.

May I also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, the Executive Director of UNICEF and the Chair of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict for their contributions today.

The Council has been very committed in building a protection framework for children in situations of armed conflict, a framework resulting from the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) three years ago. Both the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Council's Working Group resulting from resolution 1612 (2005) built upon previous efforts and created important tools to address the grave abuses against children during conflicts. We are making strides. Task forces are active or under way in all situations of concern, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has undertaken numerous visits to almost all situations of concern and the Working Group has considered and issued conclusions on nine different situations.

However, when taking stock of resolution 1612 (2005), we must ask ourselves one fundamental question: have these developments made a difference on the ground? Canada believes the answer is yes. Children and those charged with their protection in Côte d'Ivoire, in Sri Lanka and elsewhere have benefited from some parties releasing children from their ranks and others establishing action plans to do so. We consider those results to be direct impacts of resolution 1612 (2005).

Canada also sees indirect benefits of resolution 1612 (2005), such as much greater awareness of the terrible plight of these children and the collective belief that it is simply unacceptable to recruit and use children in armed conflict. That view underpins Canada's strong support for continuing the implementation of resolution 1612 (2005) and for strengthening, through a new resolution, the protection framework that resolution 1612 (2005) created by addressing the other grave violations described in past reports of the Secretary-General.

Canada was proud to support the very recently adopted resolution 1820 (2008), on sexual violence and international peace and security. While we will monitor very closely the follow-up to resolution 1820 (2008), the abuses suffered by children cannot wait for yet another report to be issued in order to trigger action. Resolution 1612 (2005) works; let us now expand its purview to include all categories of violations against children. That means not only the recruitment and use of children but also the killing and maiming of children, rape and other grave sexual violence, abductions, attacks against schools or hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access to children. As the Permanent Representative of South Africa said a few moments ago, all six violations should have equal weight. Canada calls on the Council to start negotiating a new resolution to that end.

Let me recognize the very important work of the members of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which is ably chaired by France with the strong support of the Secretariat. The Working Group forms a crucial part of the international protection framework for children affected by conflict. The Working Group's careful consideration of the situations brought to its attention can help ensure that parties respect their obligations under international law. We urge the Working Group to continue issuing strong conclusions calling for action by the various parties and to provide guidance on child protection to United Nations peacekeeping operations, political missions and country teams.

(*spoke in French*)

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the impressive work done in this area by UNICEF, various non-governmental organizations and civil society actors who contribute to the monitoring and reporting mechanism and who work tirelessly to free children from the burdens of war. There are nevertheless numerous challenges to overcome. The international community must therefore strengthen its capacity to prevent crimes against children. It must also improve its reintegration strategies and ensure that those who commit violations are held fully accountable under national and international laws. The tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute, which we are commemorating today, reminds us of the array of legal tools at our disposal to tackle impunity.

In conclusion, Canada reiterates its strong support for the work of the Security Council on the issue of children and armed conflict. Our expectations are indeed very high, but children deserve nothing less.

The President: There are still a number of speakers on my list for this meeting. In view of the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.05 p.m.